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Montgomery council to address inspector general's concerns of interference

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The Montgomery County Council will hold a public session in the next few weeks to discuss allegations by Inspector General Thomas J. Dagley that some county officials have attempted to interfere with his office's investigations.

Council President Nancy Floreen (D-At Large) and fiscal policy committee Chairman Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At Large) said Friday that they will air the claims in public, even as the office of County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) e-mailed reporters copies of memos saying he is "very concerned" about Dagley's comments and asking for an open session. He also asked the inspector general, who reports to the council, not the executive, to provide details to his office about the allegations.

The inspector general told the council Tuesday that his office's work has been hampered and, at times, interfered with by county officials, whom he didn't identify.

"This is the first I have heard of these allegations," Leggett's memo to the council said. "I have never been informed of any 'impairments' from my staff nor have I been given the opportunity to respond."

In a meeting with the council's audit committee Tuesday, Dagley cited problems in two cases involving the county police department and a third looking into payments by the county's Department of Health and Human Services to Centro Familia, a nonprofit group that offers services to preschoolers and trains in-home child-care providers. He did not offer details but said he has become increasingly concerned over the past year about his office's ability to make "timely and objective reports." He said the problems had intensified in the past year, and that as recently as last week, whistle-blowers were expressing similar concerns.

Despite Dagley's reluctance to give details to the council Tuesday, there are some clues about issues troubling the office in two bills the council recently approved that expand legal protections for whistle-blowers and allow the inspector general to hire independent legal counsel. At times, Dagley's office has been represented by the county attorney's office while the county attorney is representing the government agency under investigation.

Dagley said his office has been trying for more than a year to assess an internal police examination of the department's handling of a high-ranking fire official's four-car

accident. The official, later dismissed, had been found to have had a blood alcohol level almost twice the legal limit but was not cited for any alcohol-related offenses. Two officers have sued the county to prevent Dagley from getting information.

Dagley said Tuesday that his office is no longer receiving requested information from the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centro Familia case. The department has been quietly negotiating with Centro Familia over claims that the nonprofit owes the county about \$84,000 for fiscal 2009.

The inspector general also has examined a program that paid county employees to take classes and allowed police officers to purchase discounted weapons for personal use. In that case, and in an earlier examination of police disability claims, the Leggett administration preempted Dagley's findings with its own.

Montgomery is one of the few local governments in the country with its own inspector general, whose job is to root out waste, fraud and abuse, and to audit county spending. Dagley was appointed last year by the council to a second four-year term. Dagley is out of town and did not return a message seeking comment.

On Friday, Trachtenberg left open the possibility that part of the coming discussion at the council could end up occurring in closed session, depending on the topic, but said she prefers to have "a transparent conversation."